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Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

Support by the United Nations system of the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies

Report of the Secretary-General*

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* The footnote requested by the General Assembly in resolution 54/248 was not included in the submission.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolutions 50/133 of 20 December 1995, 51/31 of 6 December 1996, 52/18 of 21 November 1997, 53/31 of 23 November 1998 and 54/36 of 29 November 1999, the General Assembly welcomed the consecutive reports of the Secretary-General on the ways in which the United Nations system could support the efforts of Governments to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies.[1] The Assembly further encouraged the Secretary-General to continue to improve the capacity of the Organization to respond effectively to the requests of Member States in their efforts towards democratization.

2. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 54/36. It describes the activities that have taken place in the follow-up process to the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development, particularly in the preparations for the Fourth International Conference, which is to take place in Cotonou, Benin from 4 to 6 December 2000. It also addresses some conceptual issues related to democratization and proposes some strategic and organizational measures for consideration by the General Assembly and the Benin Conference.

II. Recent activities related to international conferences of new or restored democracies

3. The General Assembly, in resolution 51/31, requested the Secretary-General, Member States and appropriate specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations to cooperate in the holding of the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies on Democracy and Development, which took place in Bucharest from 2 to 4 September 1997. The Third International Conference subsequently decided to create a special follow-up mechanism to implement the recommendations of the Conference. Since the Conference, the Government of Romania, the current chair of the International Conferences of New or Restored Democracies, has continued to play a leading role in the follow-up process. The participants in the follow-up mechanism are representatives from interested countries, in particular the previous and future hosts of the International Conferences (the Philippines, Nicaragua, Romania and Benin), the United Nations system, academia, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

4. At the May 1999 meeting of the follow-up mechanism in Bucharest, Romania introduced a first draft of a "Code of Democratic Conduct", aimed at building a broad agenda for democratization. The meeting amended the draft and the revised version was published as a document of the General Assembly on 27 July 1999 (A/54/178, annex) in the form of a draft resolution, which was, however, not acted upon by the Assembly. On 25 April 2000, the Commission on Human Rights adopted a related resolution, resolution 2000/47, entitled "Promoting and consolidating democracy", highlighting fundamental links between democracy and human rights. The resolution reaffirmed the solemn responsibility of Member States to promote and protect human rights by working together to consolidate democracy, given the interdependence of democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The resolution also stressed that democracy was based on the freely expressed will of the people, including their full participation in decisions affecting their lives.

5. The follow-up mechanism met again in New York in November 1999 and in June 2000 to review preparations for the Benin Conference and to discuss the activities of the United Nations system in the area of democratization. The June meeting also discussed the note verbale that was sent to all United Nations missions by the Secretary-General on 14 March 2000, inviting Member States to give their comments and observations on the review and suggestions contained in the 1999 report of the Secretary-General on new or restored democracies (A/54/492). The note verbale has also requested Member States to review their own experiences and "lessons learned" as new, restored or established democracies and/or as donors supporting democratic institutions with projects in other countries or regions. As recommended by that meeting, a further note verbale was sent as a reminder to Member States on 3 July 2000.

III. Preparations for the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies

6. By its resolutions 53/31 and 54/36, the General Assembly, while encouraging Member States to promote democratization and to make additional efforts to promote and consolidate new or restored democracies, noted with satisfaction that the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies would take place in Cotonou, Benin. It also stressed the importance of support by Member States, the United Nations system, the specialized agencies and other intergovernmental organizations for the holding of the Fourth International Conference.

7. In June 1999, the President of Benin established a preparatory national committee for the planning and organization of the Conference with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It was decided that the theme of the Conference would be "Democracy, Peace, Security and Development". A UNDP expert team visited Cotonou from 23 to 28 August 1999 to help the Government to prepare a project document on the Conference. The initial plans were approved in September 1999 by both UNDP and the host Government.

8. The Conference will be held on 4 to 6 December 2000. Two special events, a forum for youth and a civil society forum, will precede the Conference. Regional conferences or seminars are also being organized on lessons learned about democratic transition in various parts of the world. The Permanent Mission of Benin to the United Nations Headquarters in New York is the focal point for the coordination of the preparatory process, assisted by the follow-up mechanism. Many donor countries, United Nations agencies and international organizations, including the United Nations University, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), UNDP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Organization of la Francophonie have committed themselves to contribute to the preparatory process and the organization of the Conference.

9. On 15 September 2000, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Benin, Idji Antoine Kolawole, briefed Member States at Headquarters on the ongoing preparations for the convening of the Conference. The Minister also gave a press conference the same day. In his briefing, the Minister outlined four indicative subjects on the agenda of the conference, which included: (a) exchange of experience on the best practices in building democracy and the relations between peace, security, democracy and development; (b) democracy and conflict prevention and management; (c) democracy and development and the participation of women and youth; and (d) factors that may facilitate or hinder the democratic process (good governance, violations of human rights and personal freedoms and decentralization). He also noted that the objectives of the Conference were to identify the best practices in building democracy and human rights; to define an analytical framework showing the interdependence between peace, security, development and democracy; to use case studies to illustrate the interdependence among peace, security, development and democracy; and to illustrate the implications of the democratic process for sustainable human development.

10. A number of preparatory meetings have also taken place within the preparatory process for the Benin Conference. The Government of Benin, in collaboration with the International Organization of la Francophonie, hosted a meeting on the "Assessment of national conferences and other democratic transition processes in Africa" in Cotonou from 19 to 23 February 2000. The final report of the meeting emphasized that democracy must be embedded in a political system built on the rule of law and respect for human rights. The role of civil society, women and young people in democratization as well as the fundamental need for the peaceful alternation of leaders in power were stressed. The promotion of a democratic culture, based on tolerance, acceptance of differences and a permanent search for compromise, was seen as an essential factor for the consolidation of democracy.

11. The Network Institute for Global Democratization hosted another conference, also within the framework of the preparatory process for the Benin Conference, on the theme "Cosmopolis — Democratizing Global Economy and Culture", on 2 and 3 June 2000 in Helsinki. The meeting was sponsored by the Network Institute for Global Democratization, the Theory, Culture and Society Centre of the Nottingham Trent University and Helsinki University. The Conference discussed not only the similarities and

differences but also inter- and intra-relations and globally effective social forces and tendencies related to democratization in the world.

12. Other important initiatives have taken place in other parts of the world in support of global democratization efforts. On 25 to 27 June 2000, the Government of Poland hosted a conference entitled "Towards a Community of Democracies" in Warsaw, with the Governments of the Czech Republic, Chile, India, the Republic of Korea, Mali and the United States of America acting as co-conveners. The conference was attended by 106 countries. The Warsaw Declaration adopted at the conclusion of the conference emphasized that the Community of Democracies was determined to work together to promote and strengthen democracy, to consolidate and strengthen democratic institutions and to support adherence to common democratic values and standards. These values and standards included civilian, democratic control over the military; promotion and protection of all human rights; civil, cultural, economic, political and social; and the establishment of transparent, participatory and accountable government institutions. The final report of the conference will be submitted to the Benin Conference.

IV. Building up democratic culture and society

13. For any new or restored democracy, good governance, human rights and sustainable development, as well as peace and security, are major goals in promoting and consolidating democratization. The assistance provided by the United Nations system for elections and the promotion of democratic values, and the Organization's work in human rights are vital instruments in this process. This section takes a closer look at the interlinkages of these key concepts and United Nations electoral assistance experiences.

A. Relationship between democratization, good governance, human rights, development and peace

14. Democratic governance combines the principles and processes of democracy with the institutions and processes of governance. Democratization is understood to be the process whereby democratic institutions, practices and beliefs are built and strengthened in a society. This includes fostering the participation of citizens in the democratic process. Good governance is participatory, transparent, accountable and effective. It promotes the rule of law and equal justice under the law and ensures that political, social and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society.

15. The importance of helping countries strengthen their democratic institutions and generally improve governance has been increasingly recognized within the United Nations system. Democracy, democratization and good governance figure prominently among the concerns of development agencies insofar as these factors are closely linked to sustainable human development, economic growth and peace and security. Already 50 per cent of the resources of UNDP have been allocated to programmes promoting political, economic and social governance in the following areas: supporting public sector reforms; strengthening governing institutions and governance in special circumstances; supporting decentralization and local governance; developing leadership; and enhancing democratization and political empowerment of the poor through strengthening civil society organizations.

16. Besides asking help in consolidating democratization processes as such, developing countries are also requesting more services from the United Nations in promoting good governance as a tool for achieving human development goals. For instance, within the area of governance, the United Nations system is already supporting initiatives which: promote the policy dialogue to widen development choices; strengthen the capacities of key democratic governing institutions for people-centred development; promote decentralization for stronger local governance and community empowerment; and increase efficiency and accountability in the public sector. But democratization assistance is also closely related to the wider goals of maintaining peace and security in Member States, as was recently discussed by the General Assembly and the Security Council in the African context.

17. In my first report to the General Assembly and the Security Council on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa,[2] I said that, for the establishment and maintenance of durable peace and good governance, much more had to be done to provide

an environment in which individuals would feel protected, where civil society would be able to flourish and where Government would carry out its responsibilities effectively and transparently and with adequate institutional mechanisms to ensure accountability. Such an endeavour would also involve securing respect for human rights and the rule of law, which are the cornerstones of good governance. Post-conflict peace-building in particular might involve creating or strengthening national institutions, monitoring elections, promoting human rights, providing for reintegration and rehabilitation programmes and creating conditions for resumed development.[3] Further, democratic government helps to guarantee political rights, protect economic freedoms and foster an environment where peace and development can flourish.[4]

18. In my report to the Economic and Social Council at its July 1999 session in Geneva on implementation of the recommendations contained in the above-mentioned report,[5] I mentioned other initiatives taken by the United Nations system in support of peace, without which democracy could not thrive. In this context, the report mentioned such activities as social development, the emancipation of women, improvement of trade flows and financial resource flows, support for regional cooperation and integration. Throughout the report the interrelationship between peace, development and democracy or good governance was well documented.

19. Democratization gives people a stake in society. Its importance cannot be overstated, for unless people feel that they have a true stake in society, lasting peace will not be possible and sustainable development will not be achieved. Ensuring that people feel represented in the political life of their societies is essential and, in Africa in particular, democratization can often build upon positive indigenous structures and traditional ways of inclusive governance. A crucial element in consolidating democracies is also to strengthen civil society, and especially to promote the emergence of a culture of human rights. The United Nations treaty-based human rights system provides the normative foundation for the implementation and monitoring of human rights in all countries, including countries in transition to democracy. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) can provide advisory services and technical assistance to conduct educational campaigns and to prepare appropriate reports under the core human rights treaties.

20. Elections play an important role in democratization efforts and this focus must remain strong. But elections must also be part of a long-term undertaking that will lead to a strengthening of national institutions and democratic processes. This theme will be further elaborated in the next section.

B. Electoral assistance: insights for democratization

21. Democratic elections are an important component of democracy, but they do not create democracy. The experience of the United Nations in electoral assistance activities suggests several areas for further work which will contribute to a broader framework for assistance provided by the United Nations to the democratization process.

22. In the early 1990s, the holding of elections was often a formal element of peace accords, providing a peaceful means to determine who would hold power in a post-conflict government. For many in the international community, the announcement of election results signalled an end to political crisis and the beginning of reconciliation and reconstruction. More recently, however, the demand for electoral assistance as a conflict resolution tool has been far less frequent than the demand for its use in strengthening national election processes and institutions — a direct contribution to democratization.

23. For many years the United Nations concentrated primarily on national and parliamentary elections, largely as a result of the specific requests for such assistance. Experience has demonstrated, however, that local elections often provide the first direct link between a voter and an elected official. The performance of that individual will determine whether he or she is removed, re-elected or elected to higher office. This connection between elector and elected, and the accountability of those elected at the local level, provides an important training ground for promoting democracy at the national level. In addition, the pool of locally elected and often younger officials may serve as an important source of the next generation of national politicians. Therefore, assistance with local elections offers an important and direct opening for a broader democratization process.

24. The shift to multiparty elections in many Member States required constitutional change and the rewriting of electoral laws. But changing rules and procedures to allow democratic elections was only the beginning. To consolidate the changes brought about by elections, fundamental institutional reforms and changes in attitude were also required. The view that successful elections were the final stage in the provision of international assistance was clearly flawed, as the rule of law needs to extend far beyond the electoral process itself to encompass every aspect of political, economic and social life.

25. In contrast to the relatively quick changes achieved through elections, institutionalization of the rule of law will take generations. International support for efforts to improve the rule of law therefore cannot be short term. Without such support the furthering of political, social and economic development may suffer.

26. In the early years of electoral assistance, demands for the earliest possible holding of new multi-party elections often led to the importation or adaptation of procedures and systems used in other countries. Constitutions were frequently drafted using foreign models with the primary goal of legitimizing immediate multi-party elections. But local ownership and capacity-building are important for successful elections, and even more critical for a continuous democratization process. Democratization implies an important change in values, not simply the creation of new procedures or institutions. The success of democratization depends upon the degree to which democratic ideals and practice become accepted norms for civic behaviour.

27. The progress made to date with the institutionalization of electoral processes offers encouragement for efforts in other areas of democratization. Probably most critical is the expansion of the rule of law, which may be difficult to measure at any particular time, but which exercises the most pervasive influence on government and society as a whole. Democratization is a slow but positive process and will continue to require considerable debate, adaptation and review at both the national and international levels.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

28. Although democratization has taken root as a universal norm and practice at national and local levels, the specific role of the United Nations in providing such assistance is still widely debated. I believe we should now move to clarify this role and strengthen our contribution both at the local, national, regional and global levels.

29. In February and June 2000, the Stockholm-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance organized two seminars on United Nations assistance in the democratization process for United Nations staff and diplomats, as well as for academia and NGOs. The project was funded by the Better World Fund of the United Nations Foundation. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance was specifically mentioned in the recommendation of the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, held in Bucharest in 1997, as an important contributor to the follow-up process to the Conference. A final report[6] on the seminars was submitted to me in July 2000. The report, drawing upon wide expertise and representation within the United Nations community, was an attempt to analyse the main challenges facing the United Nations in the field of democratization as well as to present to me some concrete recommendations on how the United Nations could better address these issues both from operational and policy points of view.

30. It was noted that an important current development concerning United Nations involvement in democratization support is the evolution of new types of United Nations peace operations. Unlike the traditional United Nations peacekeeping missions with ceasefire monitoring mandates, today's peace missions involve difficult and wide-ranging tasks, both in the military and civilian fields. Given the increasingly complex nature of today's conflicts, coherent and integrated strategy formulation has become more difficult, but also more necessary. Democracy-related issues also lie at the heart of many United Nations missions today. That is so because democracy, or lack thereof, is central to the root causes of many of today's violent conflicts, the majority of which are internal. Democratization is central to a state-building and peace-building exercise if peace is to become sustainable and post-conflict reconstruction and development is to succeed. In this sense, the way in

which the United Nations handles democracy-related issues in its peace missions will indeed have a great and long-lasting impact on the future of the country.

31. The report of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance identified three key challenges to United Nations involvement in democratization assistance, namely: (a) the need to develop a comprehensive and holistic approach to democracy rather than the current technical one; (b) the need to articulate and support complex democratic transformations; and (c) the need to understand that there is no quick fix for democratization. These challenges are directly linked to two major problems encountered by the United Nations programmes: insufficient understanding and consideration of local contexts in democracy-related fields; and failure to coordinate action within the United Nations system.

32. The changing context of democratization and key challenges in the new century demonstrate, according to the expert report of the International Institute, the need for the United Nations to adjust its strategies, approaches and organizational structures to new requirements. These requirements include, on the one hand, an increased ability to respond rapidly to humanitarian and peacekeeping needs, and on the other hand, more process-oriented, longer-term engagements for peace and state-building, development and democracy support, which in turn will help to prevent conflict.

33. The experts of the International Institute made the following recommendations to me to increase, in particular, our effectiveness in activities related to supporting democratization in this changing environment. Because of their forward-looking character, I will repeat here the main thrust of all these recommendations:

(a) **Adopt a learning approach**. Multilateral democracy assistance is still a new area. Therefore it is important that the United Nations approaches its own work in this field as a learning curve. This means adopting a modest attitude towards concrete situations; developing a real capacity for learning and a process for continuous assessment of its practices; and showing greater flexibility in adapting its interventions and methods of work;

(b) **Develop a "democracy database" and strategic partnerships**. In order to enhance understanding of complex issues of democratization, a database or compendium on basic democracy issues should be developed. It should include analyses, reports and research done on key issues of democracy, such as constitutional designs, electoral laws and systems, public sector and judiciary reforms and mechanisms to increase political participation and representation. The development of such a database should be done in the United Nations, but not by the United Nations alone. A wealth of experiences in democratization already exists in many places;

(c) **Avoid "Westernization" of experts**. The common misperception of democracy being a Western concept is most unfortunate. In this regard, the United Nations should try to avoid using mainly Western or "Westernized" experts on democracy, and take more advantage of the diversity of expertise that exists within developing countries;

(d) **Involve more closely a diversity of local actors**. In order to build local capacity for democratic development it is crucial that the United Nations works with a wide variety of local political, social and communal actors. Although it is impossible to involve literally everyone in society, it is crucial to encourage more dialogue and transparency;

(e) **Develop integrated United Nations programmes for democracy assistance**. Rather than each unit within the United Nations developing its own independent approach to democracy assistance, action should be developed on a cross-agency and cross-programme basis. An effective system of communication and the designation of a focal point unit will be necessary in that respect. A trust fund for democratic development could also be created to serve as an incentive for an integrated approach and coordinated action;

(f) **Design common country strategies that are locally owned and ensure continuous assessments.** In order to develop an integrated approach, the United Nations system needs to develop clear and common country strategies. Support to democratic processes should form an integral and important part of such country strategies;

(g) **Develop a roster of experts.** The United Nations should develop a roster of experts on substantive democracy issues, such as institutional capacity-building, public service administration, electoral issues and judicial reforms, and a roster of country/regional experts from different disciplines,

including history, political science, sociology, law and anthropology;

(h) **Establish a strategic unit.** While various parts of the United Nations have considerable capacity for analysing local situations, their information, knowledge, perspective and therefore analysis tend to be "compartmentalized" on the basis of strict interpretations of their respective mandates. There is a need to establish a strategic unit within the Secretariat that will assist in providing the "overall picture", design the strategy and develop tools to support the work of teams in the field;

(i) **Improve coordination and information sharing.** Mobility and rotation of personnel between departments and agencies, as well as between Headquarters and the field, should be increased in order to exchange knowledge and experiences within the system. Specialists of systems of information should be asked to help design an effective information system to share relevant experience more widely.

34. I believe that the above analysis and suggestions deserve serious consideration and further reflection by the international community. Some of the proposed structural changes should also be considered in the context of the implementation of the recommendations of the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations of 21 August 2000.[7] I suggest that both the General Assembly and the Fourth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies to be held in Benin address these questions in a methodical and comprehensive manner.

35. The implementation of the above recommendations necessitates more resources from both regular and extrabudgetary sources than the United Nations currently has available. Moreover, the present structures of the United Nations, or even those to be implemented as a follow-up to the report of the Brahimi Panel,[7] would still not be able to fulfil the objectives, strategies and measures proposed by the experts on United Nations democratization assistance.

36. Democratization and the United Nations role in providing assistance for its fulfilment are gaining momentum. This was clearly demonstrated by the unprecedented attendance of over 70 Ministers for Foreign Affairs at the aforementioned conference "Towards a Community of Democracies", which took place in Poland in June 2000. The Brahimi report on United Nations peace operations has also demonstrated that there is a new willingness to take a critical look at the structures of the United Nations and to propose radical measures to improve our delivery and integrate widely scattered operations. In all peace missions, as well as in our other activities, building democracy on a sustainable basis should be a key component.

37. At the dawn of the new century, as we prepare for the First International Conference of New or Restored Democracies to take place in Africa, I believe that the whole United Nations system stands ready to see democracy-building and democratization assistance placed among its foremost priorities. But, for this to happen in practice, we need the political, administrative and financial support of all Member States.

Notes

[1] A/50/332 and Corr.1, A/51/512, A/52/513, A/53/554 and Corr.1 and A/54/492.

[2] A/52/871-S/1998/318.

[3] Ibid., para. 63.

[4] Ibid., para. 77.

[5] E/1999/79.

[6] Democracy and Global Cooperation at the United Nations: Towards Peace, Development and Democratization, discussion paper, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Stockholm, 2000.

[7] A/55/305-S/2000/809.